ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet

EPA Midnite Mine Superfund Site, Wellpinit, WA
U.S.Environmental Protection Agency Region 10 October 2003

Cleanup of Spilled Roadside Ore Planned for Spring 2004

On June 17, 2003, EPA proposed removing uranium ore spilled along the haul route used in the past by trucks moving ore from Midnite Mine to the Dawn Mill in Ford. The haul route includes parts of the McCoy Lake-Wellpinit-Ford Road. This September, EPA mailed letters to affected property owners requesting access to their land to remove the spilled ore. With winter coming, the cleanup work probably will not start until the spring of next year. For a summary of comments received about the proposed ore removal and EPA's responses, see "Response to Comments" on page 3.

What Will Be Done?

Workers will dig up and remove spilled ore from properties along the haul route from Midnite Mine to the Dawn Mill. In 1999, and again in June of this year, EPA staff did a radiation survey along the McCoy Lake-Wellpinit-Ford Road. The survey found sources of radioactivity that were higher than local radiation levels. The radiation sources include uranium ore spilled on its way to the mill, outcrops of local rock containing radionuclides, and construction materials, such as driveway gravel.

The planned cleanup work will remove the spilled ore and associated soils that the survey identified. The cleanup will not remove natural rock outcrops or, at this time, gravel. The Tribe and EPA are evaluating the need for future action to address rock, gravel and other construction materials with higher than normal radiation levels.

You are Invited to a Public Meeting

November 19th
4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Wellpinit Fire Management
Conference Room
6290 Ford-Wellpinit Road
(just north of the high school)

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

EPA will update the community on the study at Midnite Mine, the spilled ore removal, and other site issues. Stay tuned for a postcard announcing more details about this meeting.

Why Is The Removal Necessary?

Cleaning up the spilled uranium ore near the surface will remove an unnecessary source of additional radiation exposure. People are exposed to radiation from natural sources every day, but the spilled material does not belong in areas where the public may be exposed to it. When people are exposed to extra radiation over a lifetime, their cancer risk is increased. The mine operated from the 1950s until 1981, so some of the spilled ore may have been present for many years. This action will prevent people from being exposed to the spilled ore in the future.

How Much Spilled Ore Is There?

EPA's scanner van found about 40 locations with individual radiation sources. Of these, about 20 are probably from spilled ore. The spilled ore sources are estimated to total less than 100 cubic yards, and in some places there are just a few pieces of ore. Some soil will be taken out with the ore to make sure the radiation sources are completely removed. The rest of the radiation sources identified in the scan are either granite outcrops with naturally high radiation levels, or construction materials, like gravel. These materials will not be removed during this cleanup.

Who Will Do The Work?

Under a legal agreement with EPA, Dawn Mining Company will do the work. Dawn will use contractors and employees to dig up and remove the ore and affected soils, in compliance with the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance. EPA and Spokane Tribe staff will oversee the work.

What Does The Work Involve?

Since there is a small amount of ore and it is on or near the ground surface close to the road, hand shovels or small earth moving equipment, such as a skid loader or a backhoe, will be used to dig up the ore and affected soils. The material will be put in containers or directly loaded onto a truck for transport. If ore and affected soil are still present after workers dig down a foot, they will continue digging until the material is removed. After removing the ore and soils, radiation levels will be surveyed to confirm that the materials have been removed. The holes will then be filled with clean soil.

How Long Will It Take?

EPA expects that it will take up to three weeks to dig up all of the ore and fill the holes. Digging may take more time in some areas than in others. When work is under way, traffic will be rerouted as needed to protect the workers.

Where Will The Material Go?

Trucks will take the spilled ore to Midnite Mine, where it will be stored until the mine cleanup takes place. People are less likely to be exposed to the material at the mine. EPA and the Tribe have agreed on a storage area at the Mine — a low spot on top of a large waste rock pile, so wind exposure will be minimized and water will not run off. The EPA study of Midnite Mine is nearly complete and will include alternatives for cleaning up ore and waste rock, including the material from the Ford-Wellpinit Road. We will invite the community to comment on cleanup options for Midnite Mine sometime next year.

How Will The Other Radiation Sources Be Addressed?

EPA's survey found some elevated radiation readings caused by driveway gravel that may have come from Midnite Mine. The Spokane Tribe and EPA are working together to figure out how extensively such materials might have been used for driveways and building construction in the area. EPA and the Tribe will then consider followup testing and plan a response as needed.

Who Can Answer My Other Questions?

EPA invites you to ask questions at any time by calling **Ellen Hale**, the project manager, at EPA's toll-free number: (800) 424-4372. You can also call **Randy Connolly** of the Tribe's Department of Natural Resources at (509) 258-7709, ext. 13.

Response to Comments

We appreciate the interest shown by the community at our June 17 meeting. About thirty people came to see EPA's radiation scanner van and to hear about EPA's proposal to remove the spilled roadside materials.

The Tribe supports the roadside ore cleanup, with certain modifications agreed to by EPA and outlined below. EPA received written comments from the Spokane Tribe and a local community member. Both letters supported removing the spilled material from the roadside.

♦ The community member felt that the material should be taken off the reservation for disposal. This was considered by EPA, but we have decided to keep the spilled ore at Midnite Mine until a site cleanup decision is made. The spilled material is from Midnite Mine and has the same characteristics as ore and protore (lower grade ore) at the site. Since the amount of spilled ore is very small compared to the total amount of such material at the mine, the spilled ore will not change the mine site cleanup decisions.

♦ The director of the Tribal Natural Resource Department and Tribal technical staff sent comments. Although they support removing the spilled ore, the Tribe was disappointed that EPA did not provide a separate opportunity for them to review a draft proposed plan before EPA issued it for public comment. The Tribe received the plan the day before the meeting, but the result was that the Tribal and public comment periods were combined. EPA regrets this oversight.

EPA is committed to consulting with the Tribe on project decisions. We did the radiation surveys at the Tribe's request, and shared draft documents supporting the removal action throughout the earlier planning stages. EPA scheduled the June 17 public meeting so the community could tour the scanner van and ask questions about the roadside ore survey. This meeting was combined with public release of the proposed plan with the goal of completing the removal action this year.

The Tribe's technical comments focused on EPA's study of the ore spills and how EPA assessed risks. Issues included:

- environmental risks that EPA did not assess
- nonradioactive metals which may remain in the soils after this cleanup action
- metals that emit radiation other than gamma radiation
- variations in local geologic background levels
- possible effects from ore dust on the roadside

EPA's view is that this action will reduce human health risks by reducing gamma radiation to levels typical of the Ford-Wellpinit Road. Any risks posed by other radioactive and nonradioactive metals in the excavated material will also be reduced. EPA may determine that additional action is needed, however, and could decide to do future cleanup work in this area. It will depend upon how much risk remains after the spilled ore is removed.

The Tribe sent additional technical comments after discussing its initial comments with EPA. The Tribe requested more radiation surveys and metals testing of soils. This would address concerns about possible impacts from ore dust and metals that may remain after the gamma sources are removed. During the excavation, EPA or Dawn will gather more radiation data that may clarify whether radiation levels are higher closer to the road because of dust. The Tribe will collect soil samples in the excavated areas to test for metals.

The Tribe also noted that future road work may expose additional spilled material not identified in the EPA surveys to date. The Agency agrees that a process should be developed for identifying potential radiation sources exposed in the future.

Site Description and Background

Midnite Mine is an inactive open-pit uranium mine eight miles northwest of Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Tribe Reservation. Between 1955 and 1981, Dawn Mining company mined uranium ore at Midnite Mine. Waste rock and ore piles remain on the site. Two pits remain open and contain water; the larger, more contaminated pit is fenced to prevent access. Since 1992, Dawn has been required to collect contaminated water flowing from the mined areas. The water is treated on-site to remove contamination and is discharged to a surface drainage that leads to Blue Creek. Trucks move sludge from the water treatment area to Dawn's mill and dispose of it in the lined tailings-disposal pond at the mill. This has helped reduce the amount of contaminated water leaving the site, but a more effective and permanent control is needed to protect human health and the environment.

EPA added Midnite Mine to its Superfund National Priorities List of sites eligible for federal cleanup funds. EPA tests have been completed at Midnite Mine. Data from these tests will be used to prepare a "Remedial Investigation (RI) Report." It will describe how much and what kinds of contamination exist at and near Midnite Mine, and where the contamination is located. The report will also include information on risks to human and ecological health. EPA will develop site cleanup alternatives based on this information. The Agency expects to issue the draft report in early 2004.

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Contact Information

EPA

For questions about the roadside ore removal, or technical questions about the site, please call:

Ellen Hale, Project Manager
(206) 553-1215
E-mail: *hale.ellie@epa.gov*

For more information on how to become involved, please call:

Debra Sherbina, Community Involvement Coordinator
(206) 553-0247
E-mail: *sherbina.debra@epa.gov*

You may also reach EPA through our toll free number:
1-800-424-4372

Spokane Tribal Contacts

Randy Connolly coordinates EPA-Tribe communications about Midnite Mine and two other Superfund projects of interest to the Spokane Tribe.

Randy maintains a file of project documents accessible to the public at the Tribal Natural Resources Department.

Contact Randy at (509) 258-7709, ext. 13.
E-mail: *connolly@spokanetribe.com*

EPA Internet homepage:
http://www.epa.gov/r10earth
A Web page has been developed for the **Midnite Mine Site**.
Go to the main EPA Web page, click on "Index," then click on "M" and scroll down to **Midnite Mine**.

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Alternative formats are available upon request by calling Debra Sherbina at 1-800-424-5372, ext. 0247. TTY users: please call 1-800-877-8339.

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Midnite Mine Superfund Site
Roadside Ore Cleanup Planned
Wellpinit, Washington
October 2003